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ABSTRACT

To bridge the gap between broad philosophical claims about the value of forensics and actual current practices and experiences, the concept of the "total" forensic program offers critical components that are educationally valid with numerous advantages for participants and sponsoring departments. The total approach is defined as the most comprehensive program that can be designed, managed, and supported by a particular college or university. It includes involving participating students in forensic experiences that are planned, developed, and evaluated by internal and external standards. Students are afforded numerous opportunities to develop multifaceted skills in research, organization, and presentation as they work toward achieving individual and team goals. For example, at Southwest Baptist University (Missouri) students are challenged to prepare for events they have not previously tried, and other approaches are emphasized at other schools. The total forensic program also involves students in a variety of audience settings, provides evaluative feedback for students, and remains sensitive to the problem of access in admission, theory, and practice. (KEH)

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The Nature of the "Total" Forensic Program: The 1990's and Beyond

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The Nature of the "Total" Forensic Program:
The 1990's and Beyond

The decade of the 1980's will certainly conclude with many different voices proclaiming their formulas for educational reform at a variety of levels. Indeed, preparation for a new century introduces an era of transition when calls for examination, accountability, and scrutiny of existing programs are commonplace. Few, if any, academic departments or co-curricular activities can escape the critical eyes of administrators who continually seek to fund existing programs and generate revenues for new and expanding curricula.

Our forensic programs have not escaped the harsh red pens or the annual conference tables where deliberations determine what programs remain and grow and which activities meet diminution or deletion. In his remarks at the outset of the 1989 edition of Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results, Dr. Seth Hawkins summarizes the struggle faced by many of us in forensic education when he notes, "There are more than enough forces in the academic world that threaten our activity." Further, he reminds us that "forensics must constantly justify itself and defend against budget cuts, career-obsessed students, and apathetic administrators" (5). Thus, we who believe in the activity of forensics must continually ask important questions, queries which examine

our programs and give direction for existence in the following decades.

What sustains a forensic program in an era of scrutiny? Are some supporting arguments or justifications more compelling than others? The foundations of successful programs require sources of funding that are usually built and maintained over time. Clearly, dollars are essential for survival. While numerous programs gratefully acknowledge some support from alumni and friends, others must depend upon their institutions for continued and consistent funding. After comparing forensic programs in 1987, Pamela Stepp and Ralph Thompson conclude: "For the most part, programs are funded through the institution they represent, either through student activities funds or other institutional monies" (132). Additionally, they remind us that institutional funds also comprise the largest sources of support for forensic budgets.

Recognizing the requirements for financial support, some colleagues insist that their programs are held together, in part, by strong forensic traditions. They ask, "Can you imagine a liberal arts university without a speech and debate program?" Others take a degree of pride in their abilities to lobby special administrators. Repeatedly I hear, "My dean is a former debater, and our program is fairly secure!" Most of us progress beyond these levels of justification when we realize that college administrations,

like other institutions, can change leadership and philosophies abruptly and even frequently.

On a more substantive level, many of us are prepared to theorize at length upon the unique nature of training and competition in forensics. In fact, most of us have probably assembled long documents for review committees about how forensic experience opens doors for diverse student talents. We emphasize that forensics involves an academic synthesis of many dimensions that enhance our individual and corporate living. Forensic competition, we state with pride, is preparation for life! It is "real world" involvement by providing the setting and developmental vehicles to meet, advocate, and challenge ideas. Also, it is seeking to understand and communicate some of the best treasures of our literary and cultural past.

To bridge the gap between broad philosophical claims about the value of forensics and actual practices and experiences to which students and coaches devote so much time and preparation, specific programs are needed. One particular option is the concept of the "total" forensic program. This particular emphasis, the underlying focus of this presentation, offers critical components that are educationally valid with numerous advantages for participants and sponsoring departments. However, potential barriers to the approach must be recognized and evaluated.

The concept of a total forensic program requires identification to discuss its ingredients and advantages

purposefully. Initially one may define the total approach as the most comprehensive program that can be designed, managed, and supported by a particular college or university. It includes involving participating students in forensic experiences that are planned, developed, and evaluated by internal and external standards. Scott Nobles explains that while some observers praise the wide range of current programs existing in colleges and universities as a strength, full programs reflect wiser choices. He writes: "I, too, recognize the necessity for diversity, but I hope it will never serve as rationalization for incomplete programs or as a deterrent to offering full ones" (57). Nobles advises:

> Let me challenge all of us to strive to conceptualize the optimum educational program, one with the fullest range of forensics training. Inability of some to provide an optimum or ideal program is surely insufficient excuse for not encouraging such a model. (57)

The position of this forensic educator is that the challenge of defining and developing the full program concept can be met through careful exploration of its critical dimensions. Although the following treatment of components is certainly not inclusive, it presents essentials serving to explain and support the concept.

The Multifaceted Program

An obvious but vitally important characteristic of the total forensic program is that it is multifaceted with numerous opportunities for students to develop a wide variety of research, organizational, and presentational skills. Clearly, the multidimensional approach helps to fulfill the concept of a total program. The overall organizational goal is generally described as emphasizing participation in numerous individual events along with one or more types of debate competition. While the multifaceted approach involves diverse goal setting for a speech team as a whole, it also encourages individual speakers to develop multiple skills and proficiencies through varied preparations and performances.

While I certainly affirm that many rewarding forensic programs focus successfully upon a limited number of individual events or even a single debate team, my position is that a program is strengthened through a calculated multidimensional philosophy. Further, my own experience in directing the program at Southwest Baptist University underscores numerous benefits resulting from students becoming involved in both debate and individual event competition. Of course, experience also reveals that the scope of a diverse program must be in keeping with sound individual goals, team objectives, and standards for achievement. I believe that the full program of forensics offers clear advantages serving to increase return on the

investment of time and energy expended by participants and directors of forensics.

The initial benefit derived from the multipreparation approach is that it gives students greater potential for experiencing growth and success. In a typical tournament with two or three flights for entries, a student may prepare and participate in as many as two or three events during each time pattern if scheduling and physical arrangements allow. I encourage speakers in our program to add events as the academic year progresses. Even if a student begins the year with one prepared public address event or interpretation selection and adds or revises an entry for each tournament, rewarding growth usually occurs.

An essential element of our program at Southwest Baptist University is that students are challenged to prepare for events they have not previously tried. Sometimes the lure of a pentathlon qualification becomes an effective motivator to attempt a new preparation. The practice of encouraging multiple preparation often convinces the interpretation specialist that he or she can also excel in public address, and even the traditional orator or extempore speaker may discover excitement in communicating a literary work. Student feedback from attempting new forensic ventures is generally positive, and the return of multiple ballots containing suggestions and encouragement often enhances learning and confidence.

The multifaceted forensic program becomes an excellent focus for building a team unit as members develop the practice of contributing to their squad's overall success. At Southwest Baptist, students who are strong in individual events are encouraged to find the appropriate division for debate participation while squad members with debate backgrounds are required to develop individual events in keeping with their interest and select at least one new event for challenge work. My experience with this blending of interests is that a speaker's motivation to assist the team through broader participation also brings a sense of accomplishment to individual students as well. With the adoption of the "team" philosophy, members are given opportunities to take preparation risks for their squad as well as for their own sense of achievement. The team debater, for example, who says, "I'm not an oral interpreter. I've never done it, but I'll give it a shot," contributes significantly to a team effort while also encouraging others by his example.

The multifaceted approach in forensics not only helps to solidify a program with committed student involvement, but it also promotes a unified public relations arm for a college or university. There is a strong advantage in having one recognized forensic entity that is also seen as the provider of numerous services for other academic departments and the university as a whole. In a convention paper presented in 1977, Jack Kay of the University of Nebraska

described the diverse program as providing a "vital support system" linking the university and the forensic program (7). The multifaceted approach is also emphasized by the leadership of Dr. Sam Cox at Central Missouri State University, where a vital part of the yearly forensic calendar is a service provided to the community and university through audience debates (11). The practice exists on numerous other campuses as well.

The Audience Dimension

A total forensic program does not grow in a vacuum. Hence, a critical requirement of this emphasis is that speakers, debaters, and interpreters need experience in communicating with a variety of listeners. The benefits of such a requirement are too significant to ignore if we want all dimensions of competitive individual events and debate to survive and meet potential goals.

Failing to recognize the vital role of audiences in forensic training has to be noted as a serious and frequent mistake. A simple but pointed scenario introduces the practice of ignoring the important place of diverse audiences in the total forensic experience. Members of the speech team on my particular campus often lamented that numerous university students and faculty faithfully supported the varsity basketball team, but few persons knew or seemed to care about attending the open debates and speech programs hosted by the forensic team and the communication

department. After conducting a publicity campaign throughout campus, a featured audience debate was scheduled. To the dismay of some of the debaters, a number of listeners, who were fascinated with the published national resolution for the evening, were simply "turned off" by what they heard. More than one audience member commented, "I couldn't understand them. They didn't talk to me." Others said, "The speakers didn't speak in my language." Such observations provided revealing and enlightening feedback about language choices and rate of speaking. The hard-hitting comments not only contributed to the debaters' preparation for the upcoming tournament, but the speakers also learned the essential place of audience analysis. The experience reinforced the observation that forensic events and debate speeches must be adapted to listeners whether one's audience is a single judge or a gathering of 300 persons in the university auditorium.

Recognizing and preparing to speak for an audience consisting of more than a single judge or panel is not only a sound element of communication training, but the practice represents a pedagogical goal of lifting forensic activity from the realm of academic gamesmanship to "real life" involvement. Specific benefits derived from including numerous public audiences in the total forensic program merit brief but important delineation.

A striking advantage derived from encounters with audiences comprised of more than a single judge is that

speakers and interpreters recognize the contest critic as one particular type of audience; other listening environments involve judgment and feedback from another context. Debating, speaking, and interpreting before a variety of public audiences ranging from literature classes, political science seminars, service clubs, and religious organizations clearly elicit adjustment to a variety of listeners.

The total forensic program involving a variety of audience settings avoids supporting the idea that a special audience situation is required for a student to speak. Indeed, the usual judging environment with the critic seated with ballot or flow pad in hand can encourage such an unrealistic view of "giving one's speech" that the important premise of a public communicator sharing with others is slighted or distorted. Professor Scott Nobles echoes the wisdom of debating for "real" audiences as he asks: "Is it possible that we can become so specialized and esoteric in our learning models that the art of successful advocacy in a variety of public forums becomes a lost or, at best, low-priority goal in forensics education?" (56)

To ignore the necessity of encouraging and even requiring speakers and debaters to communicate with varied audiences certainly involves a serious mistake in designing future goals. The evaluations of former debaters, for example, are often firm in their affirmation of difficulties in bridging the gap between the contest round and the real world. From his own experience, speechwriter Lee Huebner

mentions the danger that debaters are trained so that they cannot speak effectively with non-debate audiences. He explains that many former debaters must work at breaking habits developed from tournament experiences that are described as "irrelevant and even counterproductive elsewhere." To overcome these problems, he proposes that "there should be far more emphasis on audience debating--and even audience balloting" (6). Likewise, individual events from interpretation of poetry to informative address can encourage the development of personal effectiveness in communication when repeated opportunities are given for actual and varied audience experiences.

An extremely practical justification for emphasizing diverse audience experiences in the total program is that they serve as an important extension of the tournament schedule. The excitement of speaking, reading, and debating for different listeners usually generates far more impetus than merely scheduling another practice session. On our campus, the hosting of a forensic night provides a valuable vehicle to motivate the completion of preparation for a tournament while also bridging gaps in a semester's schedule. Similarly, open audience debates between announced teams give opportunities to test the strength of new cases and allow listeners to gain new perspectives on a topic of concern. Often special invitations to faculty members from disciplines such as political science,

sociology or English can mean the acquisition of in depth critiques that aid in producing substantive growth.

Providing Access and Development

The total forensic program must remain sensitive to the problem of access in admission, theory, and practice. When Don Swanson addressed the Pi Kappa Delta Developmental Conference at St. Louis in March, 1989, he dealt with the problem of elitism in forensic activity. Citing such barriers as tournament qualifications, specialized judging, entry level criteria, and esoteric styles of presentation, Professor Swanson alluded to specific signs of elitism in debate that also apply to numerous forensic events and practices. He concluded that the problem of elitism is evident when barriers "significantly limit the ability of quality students to participate" (13). Indeed, difficulties associated with balancing recognition of achievement with the need to provide access and development of new talent must be confronted by forensic educators desiring to foster the important blend of openness and recognition of quality.

The potential hazard of limited access in approaching decades can be traced to a number of practices that counter a total or open philosophy. While some programs are building speech and debate squads consisting of larger rosters of participants than ever before, others remain small, occasionally focusing on a single debate team or a very limited number of speakers or interpreters. On a number of campuses

the tradition of having only a few persons interested in speech competition is reinforced by administrative expectations. In such cases a cycle of inadequate budgeting, low expectations, and poor visibility contribute to preserving the status quo. Such an observation, however, should not be used to describe those active and productive programs operating with very limited dollars and overcoming serious obstacles to maintain small but rewarding forensic programs.

Limited access becomes a barrier to a total forensic program through some practices established in secondary schools and continued in collegiate programs. Even indirect denial of entry to forensic involvement continues to deter worthy and talented students. At the beginning level, Malcolm Sillars and David Zarefsky conclude that we "may be missing large numbers of students because our programs are geared to students from relatively well-educated homes" (88). If such an observation describes some of our nation's secondary programs, the same condition may also be observed in university forensic programs requiring or often assuming high school experience as an entry or qualifying prerequisite.

My experience leads me to maintain that a total forensic program is hampered by our failure to provide adequate instruction in forensics at college and university levels. Again, Sillars and Zarefsky note:

> Even in colleges and universities, the role of pedagogy in forensics requires reexamination. In many institutions, teaching in forensics is merely an offshoot of the intercollegiate debate program. An undergraduate course in argumentation is often a performance course largely for debaters and prospective teachers of debate. Such courses, although valuable, are insufficient means of teaching the broader perspective of forensics. (89)

Too frequently we in forensic education have been content to simply extend secondary programs and experiences instead of providing vital educational junctions for examining students' past experiences and opening new doors for questioning and growth. Total forensic programs, I insist, must not simply replicate prior secondary training of students in individual events or debate competition. Instead, students need to be encouraged to attempt new and different events and debating formats. With equal emphasis, participants need to be exposed to theories of communication and interpretation underlying the activities in which they actively participate.

Despite encouraging signs of change, efforts to open doors for beginners in forensic competition need increased support. Although initial participation in individual event categories is usually more easily accomplished than entry into competitive debate, both categories can do more to

attract newcomers. Specifically, I find that a student interested in forensics can be encouraged to research and write a public address entry or cut and prepare an interpretation selection as an avenue for competition. However, in most tournament experiences, he or she must immediately compete with very experienced or "seasoned" performers. Too few efforts are made to encourage beginners through special divisions of tournament offerings.

In debate competition, numbers of talented students are discouraged by the lack of beginning divisions for young advocates. Despite desires to compete, many potential debaters experience intense frustration in attempting to learn so much so rapidly. Because they fail to develop the command of debate language, organizational methods, and flowing skills necessary to compete with experienced students, they fail to achieve enough success to encourage continuing.

Formal opportunities for beginners in debate competition remain limited. The current American Forensic Association calendar of tournaments, for example, includes over 200 entries, but less than half of them publish divisions for novices, rookies, or beginners (8-21). Additionally, it has been my experience that some tournament officials often find it necessary to combine divisions to attain a desired number of elimination rounds. Thus, new recruits from communication classes or argumentation courses are entered in junior divisions at particular tournaments

because beginner opportunities are not offered. At other times, these same students are placed in collapsed divisions and may actually debate senior open teams for their first intercollegiate experiences. As directors of an activity with strong pedagogical interests and commitment, we must question the values motivating our practices. Is the number of elimination rounds more important than providing a competitive environment supportive of beginners? Must we assume that debate and individual event competition exist primarily for those experienced from secondary programs? Indeed, the need for growth in terms of persons involved and the conceptualization of forensics as a learning activity require us to encourage beginners. The total program of approaching decades must work for balance in rewarding achievement while also providing access and development opportunities.

Evaluative Feedback

Our awareness of the need for access to participation and the maintenance of sound educational premises necessitate a related component in the total approach to forensics: the effective use of evaluative feedback. As student participants and forensic educators, we must continually examine the rationale underlying the forensic participation. Questioning "why" we maintain a program is not only purposeful in refining goals for participants, but

it is necessary to justify a co-curricular activity with a sound academic foundation.

Feedback provided by active forensic participants and former students continues to disclose important findings as to why students are motivated to participate in forensics. While motivational theorists remind us that we increase expectancy of succeeding by experiencing success (Keller 418), we still have to ask what is meant by "success"? The answer must include scrutiny of the reasons students give for being a part of the demanding routine of preparation and competition. In the study of Pi Kappa Delta affiliates conducted by Holloway, Keefe, and Cowles, researchers found that students looked beyond winning when they listed their reasons for participation in forensics. The study discovered that 69 percent of students surveyed indicated that learning communication principles and techniques were more valuable than winning, and 74 percent valued their relationships through forensics more than winning (10). Such feedback is certainly insightful in our constant search to understand the motivation of participants. It also directs us to continually listen to those comprising our programs. Their responses, no doubt, can help us direct our energy and resources in the decades to follow.

Potential Barriers

With the numerous justifications and advantages supporting the total approach to forensics, potential

barriers remain. Thus, in summary, we must also observe a number of pitfalls associated with components presented earlier.

I agree with the research findings repeatedly contending that forensic programs will continue to depend upon their sponsoring departments of communication and their parent colleges and universities. Such a relationship must be strengthened by continued efforts to apprise college administrators of the unique values derived from forensic programs. As noted, the total program of forensics offers numerous features making participation pedagogically sound as well as rewarding to the sponsoring university or college. The potential danger, however, is the gradual deterioration or neglect of communication between programs and their parent departments and institutions.

The multifaceted approach, the heart of the total program, faces a number of challenges. For example, extended tournament schedules in both debate and individual events often make it increasingly difficult for gifted and extremely serious students to be away from classes to participate for longer periods of time. Other tournaments, because of time factors, schedule individual events and debate so that speakers may not participate in both divisions of a tournament. Thus, students desiring and preparing to debate and compete in individual events and/or interpretation categories are sometimes denied opportunities. Additionally, some students find that they must

specialize in limited events or debate to achieve their standards of success. Even though the rationale for their choices is certainly understood, they miss opportunities to develop additional skills gained through diversity of preparation.

Despite significant benefits derived from participation in national tournaments at the conclusion of a forensic year, some speakers and programs focus so narrowly upon achieving individual qualifications that team growth is neglected. Caution should be taken to link individual and team goals in order to strengthen squad unity and enhance member satisfaction. The total forensic approach can help to meet goals of motivated individuals and the team as a whole.

The broader audience experiences of the total forensic concept can certainly be accomplished with deliberate planning, but much of the success of this dimension depends upon the dedication of the director of forensics and the willing support of members of the speech team. The audience element can be an integral part of any program regardless of its depth or limitations. However, the total program with debate, individual speaking events, and oral interpretation is certainly superior to the program consisting of one dimension. On the other hand, limited programs not only deny potential vehicles for development of talent, but they also curtail potential service to the local community. The

failure to utilize varied audiences to enrich all dimensions of the total program involves a loss.

We have also seen that some students continue to face entry limitations in developing forensic skills, and deliberate and unintentional practices and circumstances can combine to shape forensics as an elite activity. Even well-meaning programs and organizations can pose barriers for the total forensic program philosophy. Additional research and discussion of potential limiting forces are needed in our era of transition. Certainly, any future measurement of success should include evaluative feedback from student speakers and interpreters, those for whom our programs exist.

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